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SUBJECT: NATO SYG SAYS MONTENEGRO ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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¶1. (SBU) NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer visited Montenegro for several hours on March 16. Following meetings with top GoM interlocutors, Scheffer briefed NATO Ambassadors. He made the following points:

-- The Montenegrins uniformly expressed eagerness to move quickly to sign a security agreement. They are working on a Presentation Document for PfP and are "on the right track."

-- They all requested support for the establishment of a Montenegro Mission in Brussels, and the assignment of a NATO Liaison in Podgorica. Scheffer said first of these should be no problem, but the second depends on resources, and may have to be covered from an unspecified neighboring country.

-- GoM interlocutors believe public awareness of NATO needs to be improved, although most of them said it was fairly good. The dissenter was Parliament Speaker Ranko Krivokapic, who believes the problem is deeper than a lack of awareness, and that even the younger generation will be hard to convince because of "institutionalized nationalism." A couple of the Ambassadors suggested that the Speaker's view was perhaps too pessimistic, and the SYG noted that Krivokapic had been referring to a general problem with NATO perception in the region, not just in Montenegro. However, Ambassadors did suggest that efforts to get MNs to travel and gain exposure to the outside world would be very helpful.

-- Again on public awareness, the SYG told all Montenegrin interlocutors that the "homework" on this should start with them, but that NATO will also work the issue.

-- On Kosovo, the SYG said President Vujanovic had repeated his expectation that Montenegro would keep a low profile on the issue. The "President's international affairs advisor" (from the SYG's description -- short, black hair, former "minister" in SaM -- it may have been former SaM Deputy Minister of Defense Vukasin Maras) said there was no other option for Serbia but to accept the Ahtisaari proposal.

¶2. (U) Comment: After 13 minutes of quality time with the Ambassadors, Scheffer had to run for his flight. His bottom line was that the Montenegrins seem well motivated to "do their homework" even though, as the Defense Minister had told him, they are starting from scratch. Post concurs with his assessment.

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